

Automakers Surpass Federal Carbon Standard Again, but How Exactly?

If the industry hits its target every year to 2025, new cars will spew out six billion tons less CO2, as much as the whole country emits annually.

By John H. Cushman Jr., InsideClimate News

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For the second year in a row, automakers in 2013 surpassed the ambitious fuel-efficiency and emission-reduction demands of federal regulators, the Environmental Protection Agency reported Thursday. The rules, first set in 2010, are meant to double the performance of American cars by the year 2025.

On average, the industry <u>beat the annual goal for greenhouse gas emissions by 12 grams</u> [2] per vehicle-mile traveled, slightly better than the year before, the report said.

That may not sound like much, but it keeps the industry on track toward complying with one of the most significant regulations the United States has ever imposed on greenhouse gases. If the industry hits its target every year from 2012 to 2025, the new cars Americans buy in those years will spew out a whopping six billion tons less carbon dioxide. That's the same amount of CO2 as the whole country emits annually from fossil fuel use.

There's no guarantee that Detroit's performance was as good in 2014, or will be matched in 2015, given that fuel prices have plummeted and some consumers are opting to buy gas-guzzlers instead of lean, green driving machines.

But the EPA has its eyes on the long haul, said Janet McCabe, acting assistant administrator, in a conference call with reporters. Even the relatively inefficient trucks and sport utility vehicles are getting more efficient each year, she said.

Data presented in the reports shows that automakers continue to rely on a system, built into the regulations, that allows them to bank credits from early compliance, as well as from adopting

certain new technologies, making the goals easier to achieve. Companies that fall short of the EPA's goals can purchase the surplus credits from other companies.

"Today's EPA report shows many automakers are complying with the standards not by cleaning up their cars but by counting credits," said Dan Becker, director of the safe climate campaign at the Center for Auto Safety.

This "flexibility" is a key feature of the program, McCabe said, allowing consumers to choose the cars they want while the industry as a whole moves ahead.

Two-thirds of the automakers' greenhouse gas reductions came from lower tailpipe emissions, said Chris Grundler, EPA's director of transportation and air quality. The rest came from automakers claiming credits for more efficient air conditioners in the cars, he said, or for producing flexible-fuel vehicles that burn cleaner fuels than gasoline.

Becker said that in practice the flex-fuel cars may not actually burn alternative fuels, making these "sham" credits, and that the automakers probably would have adopted more efficient air conditioners with or without the special credits that the rules provide.

But Don Anair, research director for clean vehicles at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the new rules "were a major achievement and this new EPA report shows just how well they are working."

The cars that came out in 2010, he said, are polluting nine percent less than 2010 models, saving each driver of those cars \$100 at the pump this year—and saving an estimated total \$17 billion in the years ahead. Given his group's goal of cutting American oil consumption in half in the next 20 years, he said, "we're heading in the right direction."

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